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Review.

SCS #1430

Thomas, F. Torrance



A
S E R M O N
O N
INTERCESSION,
A N D A N
I N S T R U C T I O N
C O N C E R N I N G
O A T H S.

BY SAMUEL CHARTERS,
MINISTER OF WILTON.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following **SERMON** was published by the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge in 1779. **AN INSTRUCTION CONCERNING OATHS** was published by the Presbytery of Jedburgh in 1782. The alterations in this edition are made by the Author.

A
S E R M O N.

I TIMOTHY, ii. 1.

INTERCESSIONS.

INTERCESSIONS have an effect on social virtue.

PRAYER for our Country is a mean of loving it. The Psalmist concludes his prayer for Jerusalem with this resolution, “ I will seek thy good.” Love to the Public, when exalted by Prayer, discovers itself in generous sentiment and heroic virtue. The voice of interest, of pleasure, and of
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every selfish passion is put to silence. The Lover of Truth and of his Country is ready, in their cause, to sacrifice whatever is desirable and dear. “Forgive their sin,” said Moses, when interceding for Israel, “forgive their sin I pray thee, or blot me out of the book which thou hast written.” Esther, when her people were devoted, consecrated three days to Prayer, “after which I will go in unto the king which is not according to the Law, and if I perish I perish.” Judas Maccabeus, in the day of national calamity, retained in the wilderness, and cherished by Prayer, love to his country and reverence for her laws: his example animated a few friends: by repeated successes they greatly multiplied: “fighting with their hands and praying unto God with their hearts, they waxed valiant, out of weakness were made strong, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

WHILE war and rumours of war prevail, a relation to the Public, concern for its interests, and compassion for human misery

fery are deeply felt. These feelings are expressed in intercession and supplication. We contemplate the Almighty in his righteous judgments, correcting a luxurious selfish spirit, humbling the pride of wealth rank and dominion, calling forth the active and generous and sympathising virtues. By faith we see the cloud dissolve. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee."

ABRAHAM'S intercession for Sodom did not avert the impending judgment; but he felt a generous concern for human nature, he enjoyed communion with God, and entered into the plan of his providence in shewing favour to the wicked for the sake of the righteous. Instead of a careless indifference and cold insensibility, he looked toward Sodom, pondering the ways of God. "I will sing of judgment and of mercy: to thee, O Lord, will I sing."

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST is an object more liberal and extensive than our native land, and attracts more powerfully the prayers of Christians. "Thy kingdom

“ come. Thy will be done on earth as it
 “ is in heaven.” We feel ourselves the
 subjects of a kingdom not of this world,
 and every child of God our fellow-citizen.
 We feel an union of spiritual interests, and
 privileges, and hopes. Zeal passes from
 the brightest temporal object ; and fixes
 on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Ho-
 ly Ghost.

IN praying for the Church, it is of con-
 sequence to know for what we pray. Pub-
 lic spirit, when misguided, violates the
 laws ; and a misguided zeal for the Church
 of Christ violates his law of love. The
 church of Christ is not limited by any
 particular form of worship, or government,
 or belief ; it comprehends all who love the
 Lord Jesus in sincerity. Our external con-
 stitution, like the fabric in which we wor-
 ship, will fall into decay, and the form will
 be changed ; but the reign of Christ is in
 the hearts of men. “ So long as the sun
 “ and moon endure, a Seed shall serve
 “ him.”

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WHILE devout love extends to Christians of every denomination, we contemplate the hand of Providence in the different ways of thinking among men. These call forth the exercise of reason, and lead to the discovery of truth. They kindle a zeal for truth which made Paul assert and vindicate, in opposition to Peter, the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. From the days of Paul many able assertors of liberty have arisen. Tyranny over the human understanding has been resisted even unto blood; and, after the struggle of ages, the air of liberty is breathed again. We behold abounding sects, as so many pledges of the right of private judgment—a sacred right, which it is the glory of this nation and of this age to respect.

THERE is indeed a dark side. Strife and contention sometimes mingle. This is a memorial of human frailty. Desire springs forward to the rest that remains. We look up to God “who stills the noise
“of the waves and the tumults of the
“people,” and trace the operation of his
Providence.

Providence. Divisions, which were formed in anger and stained with blood, redound to the increase of knowledge and forbearance. Principle is respected, and mistakes are pardoned. The multitude of sects abates their animosity. They are drawn together again by the band of love, and at last conclude, That “to fear God and keep
“his commandments is the whole of
“man.”

IN praying for all men, we remember that they are brethren; that we shall sleep together in the dust; that we are fellow-travellers to a land where strife and contention, anger and debate, pride and hypocrisy shall prevail no more. We join our prayers and praises with those who fear God and work righteousness, of every nation and kindred and language. “Let the
“people praise thee, O Lord, let all the
“people praise thee.”

WHILE prayers for the public weal are offered up, there is often, it must be owned, a listless indifference in our assemblies.

blies. Whether it be that the object is too great, or that the fameness tires, or that our method be defective, or that human laws accord not with the spirit of prayer, or that love to the public and zeal for religion be indeed waxing cold; or whatever else be the cause, the effect is visible. I shall therefore prosecute the argument in particular and familiar instances.

INTERCESSION improves and regulates parental love. Can a mother forget her sucking child, compassed about with dangers by night and by day, the least of which may destroy? Can she better express her compassion, and ensure the success and comfort of her own care and watchfulness, than by committing her child to “the Shepherd of Israel, who slumbers not nor sleeps?”

YOUTH is the season of temptation. While Job’s children were feasting, “he offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, It may be my children have sinned.” Intercession directs

directs parental love, not to the wealth and beauty and worldly honour ; but rather to the innocence and piety of children.

MANY of our young men go abroad, especially in war. To parents the hour of separation is dark. They follow their children in devout affection through scenes of manifold danger and temptation. Rest returns to their souls in committing them to God, who is “ the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea.”

EVEN in the case of a degenerate child, hope is cherished by communion with him who “ waiteth to be gracious.”

THE affectionate supplication of parents may prove a mean of reclaiming the prodigal. In a solitary hour he will perhaps reflect on their unmerited affection, and listen to the voice of nature, and meditate a return to virtue. These reflections, it is true, are swept away in the next excess of riot. They will recur however
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and make a deep impression, so soon as disease or want or imprisonment has brought him to himself. Beginning in good earnest to relent, and to think if any mean of reconciliation be yet in his power; he is not a little encouraged by the devout concern of his parents. If they be earnest to obtain forgiveness from God, they themselves will not withhold forgiveness.

THE prayer which little children are taught to put up for their father and their mother, may be considered as the beginning of piety and filial love, and a mean of unfolding them.

OBJECTIONS have indeed been made to the teaching of piety to children; and a well known writer on education has condemned it †. In a question of this kind,
parents

† ROUSSEAU seems to be an enemy to prayer in every form. "I thank God for his gifts; but I do not pray to him. What should I ask?" He professes "not to philosophize with his pupil, but to assist him in consulting his own heart." And is there

parents will judge for themselves ; but, in forming a judgment, they might enquire, If there be instinctive regards to a heavenly as well as to earthly parents ; if a taste
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not in the heart a tendency to prayer, strongly felt at times ; as in danger, which human power cannot avert ; in perplexity, from which human prudence cannot extricate ; under sorrow, for which this world yields no consolation ; and under the pangs of an awakened conscience ? And is there not a similar tendency to intercession ? “ God help you,” is a common and natural exclamation when the help of man is vain. “ The Lord have mercy on your soul,” are the last words when sentence of death is pronounced. It is the returning sentiment of compassion which passes from the severity of justice to a tribunal where mercy may be found. Why do the people desire the prayers of prophets and saints, and estimate their prayers according to their sanctity ? Was it not a dictate of the heart that made the mothers of Israel bring their little children to Jesus, that he might put his hands on them and pray ? What means that ancient practice of asking a parent’s blessing, asking it in the most interesting moments, when they leave their father’s house, or when, on his death-bed, he bids them a last farewell ? And why does a parent’s curse in those interesting moments make the blood run cold ? Rousseau
himself

for Devotion, as well as for propriety and elegance, may improve by culture ; if early impressions of piety be apt to recur after youthful dissipation had seemed to efface them ; and if they who do not remember their Creator in the days of their youth be likely ever to remember him. They might enquire what this meaneth, “ Suffer “ little children to come unto me ;” and what this promise meaneth, “ They that “ seek me early shall find me.”

AFFECTION descends, and love to parents is not so easily retained as love to children. Most of the passions subside with age, and the last human passion which warms the heart is love to children. The young are agitated with new connections and pursuits, which obstruct the returns of

himself drops a philosophy which accords so ill with human nature, and so very ill with the peculiar sensibility of his own heart; and describes, in another part of his works, with his usual eloquence, the tendency to intercession, with its consoling and reclaiming power, in the case of a believing wife for an unbelieving husband.

filial love. Prayer for parents might, in some measure, remove those obstructions. Even in foreign lands, and amidst busy scenes, the heart would melt at times with the remembrance of aged parents, and yield many soothing acknowledgements of the debt of love which they still owe.

THE prayers of parents with and for their children have an effect on filial love. "I bless the Lord," says Mr Flavel, "for a religious tender father, who often poured out his soul to God for me. This stock of prayers and blessings I esteem above the fairest inheritance on earth." With one who is apt to reflect and feel, the remembrance of many prayers, which pious parents offered up, is a touching remembrance, and draws to virtue, "Shall I trouble their rest by departing from innocence? Shall I frustrate the last strong desire of their parting spirits? Can I doubt that the favour of God extends to the children of his worshippers? From the day that they forsook me, his favour hath compassed me about, it still encompasseth me."

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—In this train of thought, ancient affection revives, the force of example is felt, and the sweetness of promise, and the power of prayer.

THE Prayers of Husband and Wife for each other tend to strengthen and sweeten their union. Affection may decline, it may be interrupted by sallies of unguarded passion, it may be soured by peevishness. These evils might be prevented by praying for each other. When they call to mind in the presence of God, the relation by which they are connected, and the duties which belong to it, they feel an indispensable obligation to fulfil them. Every neglect is perceived to be wrong. Infidelity is thought of with horror, as a violation of the oath of God, and the utter extinction of domestic peace. A sense of duty is brought in to the aid of affection by prayer; nor is there a likelier method to revive affection, and re-establish kind offices upon their true foundation.

IF the yoke be unequal, prayer is a resource to the believer. A believing wife, who meets with unkindness where she looked for love, and had reason to expect it, silently takes up her cross, intercedes with him who can change the heart, and overcomes evil with good. The trial may be lengthened out, but prayer opens the designs of Providence. Your way is hedged with thorns, but they are planted by a father's hand. He makes the staff of human comfort pierce through your hand and break under you, that his own rod and staff may comfort you. Great is the reward of meekness and patience, of prayers and tears, of humble silent despised virtue.

INTERCESSION sustains and elevates Friendship. Prayer for an absent friend revives ancient affection with a pleasing warmth. It unites us, as it were, in the presence of that Being who sees at once the thoughts of every heart. We anticipate an everlasting union, and are animated in the way that leads to it.

IT

IT supports and encourages a good man in the ways of goodness, to think that his friends interest themselves in the continuance and progress of his virtue, that they are instant with God in his behalf.

IF he ever falls from innocence, he has this mournful consolation, that the friends of virtue weep with him ; that their supplications ascend with his for pardon and reconciliation, for redoubled watchfulness and zeal ; that the stain on his christian profession may be wiped off, and the wound in his conscience healed.

SUPPLICATION for a brother overtaken in a fault conveys this caution to the suppliant : “ Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

THE prayers of a Minister for the People to whom he ministers, lead to tenderness and condescension. They subdue pride, impatience, and langour in the work of the ministry. His soul is stirred up with the elevating thought that he is
a fellow-

a fellow-worker together with God. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is a pattern: "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in his love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." In the progress of this prayer the Apostle warms, and glows, and labours for adequate language; his own soul is filled with all that fulness. This is a natural effect of Intercession. In the moments of communion with God, divine love is shed abroad in the heart of the worshipper, it is reflected on those who are dear to him, and expands in devout benevolence. To this exercise the Creator has annexed delight.

THE delight indeed is transient ; and they who would protract it often fall into an uneasy state of mind, to which darkness, desertion, and other mournful names are given. If you would escape from that uneasy state, mingle active virtue with piety, and to your prayers for others add labours of love.

THE Intercession of JESUS, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, is one of the many particulars in which the doctrine of mediation corresponds to human nature. He prayed for his disciples in the hour of temptation, and in the hour of sorrow. It is a standing consolation to his friends, that “ we have an advocate with
“ the Father, even Jesus Christ the right-
“ teous.” It is a bond of union with Jesus, and a pledge of the continuance of his love. It is a new and living way by which we have boldness to draw near to God.

PRAYER for the Afflicted moulds the heart into a serious frame. We think on
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the worth and uncertainty of health, and view our life on earth as a pilgrimage.

BISHOP BUTLER observes, That “ compassion is added to the general principle of benevolence, to give it a special bias to the miserable, with a view to prevent or alleviate misery.” Agreeably to this it may be further observed, that those who pray for others feel themselves particularly interested in the cause of the afflicted, and are disposed to pray earnestly for them. This may be considered as an additional provision for the exercise of good offices toward those who stand most in need of them.

FOR the good offices which prayer inspires, a reward is provided in the prayers of those who receive them. It is natural for one who is deeply injured to cry unto God against the oppressor ; and when delivered, to pray for his deliverer. “ The Lord requite you,” is a common expression of gratitude with those who can make no other requital : it is one of the cases where

where a tendency to intercession is felt, and the devout cherish gratitude by prayer for their benefactors. To the malevolent it is an alarming thought, That the cry of those whom he has injured is entering into the ear of the Lord ; while the humane think with pleasure, that prayers for them are rising up as incense from the hearts of those whom they have instructed and relieved and comforted. This pleasure is a reward suited to the frame of devout benevolence.

EVEN when we have it not in our power to give any considerable relief, it still yields some comfort to the afflicted to share the sympathy of those around them. It is comfort to have the burden of their afflictions, the secret workings of their souls unfolded, and expressed in prayer by a tender hearted Christian.

PRAYERS for the sick are enjoined in Scripture, and it goes with the current of the heart to offer them. When a friend is sick of an incurable disease, and our

friendship cannot make the cup pass from him, we lift up our souls in prayer to the God of all consolation. Importunity, which some have censured, but which Christ enjoins, is then felt to be a dictate of the heart as well as of the gospel. Fervent supplication begets a just sense of spiritual good things. As the fire of devotion burns we set our hearts on the favour of God, and feel that happiness depends upon it. Fervid desires toward God moderate every worldly desire. Our souls return unto their rest. If this be the tendency of fervent prayer, the objection against fervour is removed. If still it shall be called Enthusiasm, there is nothing in a word. If an elevation of mind above this world ; if a generous love, whose bands affliction cannot loose ; if a sense of the real permanent interests of human nature, and ardent aspirations after them---if this be enthusiasm, it is yet an enthusiasm which every good man loves to feel, in which he rejoices, yea and will rejoice.

THE afflicted are disposed in their turn to pray for those who sympathise with and minister to them. When one is sick unto death, those who are dear to him naturally rush into his mind, and he as naturally commends them to God, and commits them to his providential care. A dying man seems nearer to God ; his prayers make a deep impression on children and friends ; and perhaps on enemies, when he prays God to forgive them. Eusebius tells of a martyr who obtained an hour's respite, and employed it in prayer, supplication, and giving of thanks for all men. He remembered those who were known and dear to him. He prayed for Christians, and Jews, and Gentiles ; for the Emperor by whose edict he suffered, for the executioners, and the spectators.

THERE is an elevation and dignity in the prayer of a dying Christian. His own affliction is lost in a generous concern for others. He was never more a citizen of the world, and never more zealous for
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the interests of truth and virtue. Far from renouncing his attachments here, he yields his heart to all the fervour and tenderness of love. Love was the prevailing affection of his life, and he utters his last breath in prayers for his brethren.

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THE SOCIETY FOR PROPAGATING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE was formed about the beginning of this century. It has obtained countenance from the Legislature, the General Assembly, and many liberal Christians. Much good has been done. In the state of the Highlands, it appears that much remains to be done. Fellow citizens in want and ignorance, have a claim to the alms and prayers of their happier brethren.

SOME complain of the decay of piety ; and there are symptoms of decay. Two occur in the printed state of the Society. One is, that twenty thousand pounds of the produce of the forfeited estates were appropriated by Parliament, for erecting schools in the Highlands, but never applied: We cannot help imagining to ourselves the good this would have done, and regretting that it is left undone. The other is, that many parishes have no legal schoolmaster: We know not the grounds upon which the heritors

heritors justify themselves ; but if it be indeed the love of money, which makes them withhold the pittance allowed by law to schoolmasters, we must conclude that Christian knowledge is of small moment in their eye.

THERE are other symptoms of the decay of piety which I will not enumerate ; but, in the midst of these, the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge is a symptom of the first love, and an attempt to quicken the things that are ready to die. While persons every way eminent join in so good a work, and the hearts of the people open, and the pleasure of the Lord prospers, we cannot think that faith and charity have failed.

THIS institution gives an object and an effect to Christian zeal. The influence of rank, and the powers of genius, and the knowledge of affairs, are exerted in the cause of piety. Intercession and giving of thanks accord with your pious labours. While you plant and water, you look to
 God

God for the increase: When he giveth the increase, you offer thanksgiving.

THE exercise of devotion will enlighten your zeal, and support you under discouragements, and raise you above the praise of men. To the praise of men you are justly entitled; it is no mean reward, and it is freely given you; but, in the presence of God, you feel and acknowledge that you have done only what was your duty to do.

You are zealous to propagate the gospel in distant corners; and you will be still more zealous where you are more immediately accountable. Command your children and your household to keep the way of the Lord. Confess Jesus before men; your example will encourage fearful and faint-hearted disciples to confess him.

ONE end of this Institution is to prevent the growth of Popery. It is meet that our deliverance from that cruel superstition be remembered with gratitude, and that proper means be used for perpetuating the de-

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liverance. One mean of acknowledged propriety and of proven success is, to propagate Christian Knowledge. A form of worship where the understanding and the heart are excluded, cannot bear the light. Your zeal for the **PROTESTANT INTEREST** is becoming, while it prompts you to instruct the ignorant.

THE fund for propagating Christianity is a standing admonition to the rich. They are impatient of the word of exhortation, and this is a silent monitor. One who has leisure and a taste for doing good, may turn a little money to more account by bestowing it in his own way; but some who have large estates, and are liberally paid by the public, have not leisure to turn what they bestow to a good account: By bestowing it here that will be done. The rich are most interested in the public weal, and this is one way of promoting it.

SOME who are very rich are yet, from peculiar circumstances in their lot, very unhappy: From forwarding this and other
good

good works, they might derive consolation.

IN the day of prosperity the heart devises liberal things. When you succeed to an inheritance, or prosper in trade, or obtain a lucrative employment, or a rich alliance, or any domestic joy, here you may present a thank-offering, and hallow your joy.

HERE likewise sin-offerings may be offered. They who have deceived and corrupted youth, if they be now come to a better mind, may contribute to fortify the young against future deceivers.

IN a commercial state, where money is so much valued, and poverty despised, iniquity will abound: In turning from iniquity, restitution is essential. There are cases where it cannot be made to the persons injured. The resolution of casuists is, that the money should be given to some pious use. Here you may give it with secrecy, and with confidence that it will be properly applied.

THEY who have grown rich by traffic, without conscious fraud, have yet reason to suspect themselves. The desire of gain, which is habitual to a trafficker; the opportunities for defrauding which fall in his way; the doubtful cases which arise, and which self-partiality is apt to determine, are grounds of suspicion. One of a tender conscience will purify his gains by an offering.

WE cannot but observe, even in some of the best characters among the rich, “one thing wanting.” They are found in the faith, and regular in their conduct, and amiable in their manners: They are not far from the kingdom of heaven. Let such do good, and be rich in good works; that they may lay hold on eternal life.

A LEGACY, though it be the least edifying and least meritorious charity, is better than none.

THEY who have not much to give, have an opportunity, on the return of this day, to express their good wishes by their mite.

ATTENTION

ATTENTION to this, and other good works, might correct the present tendency to expensive living, by which so many families are broken down, and credit shaken. We may indeed tell the expensive, how much good might be done with the price of one entertainment, or of one ornament; and they sometimes listen; for a compassionate and expensive turn are not incompatible. An eloquent representation might draw from them considerable sums. If I possessed such eloquence I would hesitate to exert it. It would be wrong to give to this, or any other charity, what is due to your creditors, or to those of your own house. You yourselves would repent. The gifts of the wise, like those of God, are without repentance.

MODERATION in all things is a pure and permanent source of good works. When you have tasted the pleasure of doing good, it will bear down the pleasure of expensive shew. Instead of contriving additional conveniences, and ornaments, and meats, you will contrive which of them may be spared.

Difficulty

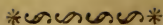
Difficulty in paying debt arises chiefly from the purchase of superfluities. By retrenching these, you will be able to pay punctually, and have something over to indulge benevolence.

BESIDE the direct influence of this institution, it is a memorial of the importance of Christianity, and a provocation to spread it by every proper mean. Such means every Christian possesses, in some degree, by his prayers and by his pattern; by the influence of rank, and wealth, and reputation; and by his influence with those who esteem and love him. Such of us as have families may propagate Christian knowledge with success in them. Many who have families might entertain and educate one or more of the children of the poor. This appears to me a method of doing the most good at the least expence. It is rescuing a fellow creature from ignorance and bad habits. The field which we cultivate, and the plants which we rear, acquire an interest in our care: Much more the human heart, where we have sown and reared the fruits of righteousness,

teousness. “Whoſo receiveth one of theſe
“ little ones in my name, receiveth me.”

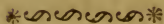
THE number of poor children is at preſent great. The families of many ſoldiers and ſailors are left in want: Kindneſs is due to them. The portion of many orphans and fatherleſs children is loſt by bankruptcy. If men who live in pleaſure, and contract debt without the means of paying it, and ſtoop to falſehood and fraud; if ſuch men cannot feel for the miſery they draw down on the innocent, it is the more neceſſary that Chriſtians endeavour to alleviate that miſery. Self-denial in this cauſe, and an oeconomy which the world condemns, are ſacrifices with which God is well pleaſed.

OTHER ways of doing good might be ſuggeſted; but, if you be zealous for good works, your own heart will ſuggeſt them.



A N
I N S T R U C T I O N
C O N C E R N I N G
O A T H S.

Composed for the PRESBYTERY of JEDBURGH,
in the year 1782.



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I N S T R U C T I O N

C O N C E R N I N G

O A T H S.

THE PRESBYTERY having received information that OATHS are not duly regarded, to the unspeakable hazard of mens temporal and eternal interests, do appoint the following INSTRUCTION to be read from the pulpits in their bounds, on the day appointed for national fasting and humiliation.

THE Scripture says, That “ an oath for
“ confirmation is the end of all strife.” It
is therefore lawful and right for Christians

to give evidence upon oath, when properly called upon to do it.

WHEN this is to be done, endeavour to compose and recollect yourselves. You pray in the morning of the day for grace to fulfil the duties, and to resist the temptations of it. Pray with particular earnestness on the morning of that day in which you are to swear, that you be not led into temptation.

IT appears from the information given, that witnesses sometimes attempt to disguise falsehood under the appearance of truth. In every part of religious and moral conduct the intention is chiefly to be regarded. If you intend when upon oath, by shifting the question and avoiding a direct answer, to conceal the truth; if you intend, by using expressions which admit of two meanings, to mislead the judge or jury; if you intend, by secret exceptions or additions, to render your assertion different from what it is understood to be; if by such ways as these, you intend to conceal or disguise

guise the truth, so as to obstruct or pervert the course of justice, you bear false witness and take God's name in vain. He sees through all your disguises. You cannot deceive him, but you fatally deceive yourselves.

“Wo unto you ye blind guides,” said our Lord to the Scribes and Pharisees, “which say, who so shall swear by the temple it is nothing, but who so shall swear by the gold of the temple he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind, for whether is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?” Prevarication upon oath was one of the deep corruptions of true religion which Jesus came into this world to condemn. There was no guile found in his mouth. Simplicity and godly sincerity are marks of his disciples. A Christian is bound to truth by higher motives than the fear of men, nor does he hold himself innocent merely because human laws cannot reach him. He fears God who searches the heart, and is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

EVIL

EVIL must not be done that good may come. You must not swear falsely to procure any seeming good. It may seem excusable to swerve from truth a little in your oath, for the advantage of the town or of any community to which you belong, or of any party or faction you espouse: it may seem grateful to a rich man who favours you, to give your evidence a turn in his favour: it may seem generous, by a little prevarication, to serve the interests of a friend: it may seem an act of filial love to screen your father's property from his creditors, by swearing that it is your's: it may seem compassionate, by bearing false witness, to screen the guilty from punishment. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Truth and justice are of higher and more indispensable obligation than generosity and affection and compassion.

"THOU shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: Thine eye shall not pity," are laws to the witness as well as to the judge.

When

When giving evidence upon oath you are acting for the public, promoting the course of justice, fulfilling the duty of a citizen. Private considerations and passions of every kind should then be sacrificed to the public good. It is for the good of the Public that truth prevail and justice be done.

CONSIDER yourself not as a witness for the party at whose instance you are called, so as to say every thing which may serve his cause and nothing against it, but rather as a witness to the truth. Pretend not to give a full account of things you do not fully and certainly know. Do not favour a poor man in his cause, nor honour the person of the mighty. Neither give your evidence a turn to the advantage of a generous man, nor to the prejudice of an oppressor. Suffer not zeal for a good cause, nor abhorrence of evil to transport you beyond the sacred boundary of truth. If you perceive that the judge or jury mistake your meaning, interpose to set them right. If you know any material circumstance which
has

has not been asked, it is fit to mention it ; and if, after mature recollection, a doubt about any fact remains, it is fit to express that doubt. To tell all the truth, and nothing but truth, is what an oath requires.

A WITNESS must begin his testimony with avowing himself impartial. It is a wise precaution. Friendship or attachment, favours received or expected, ill-will or jealousy or envy, eventual gain or loss, are biasses even with the upright. Let a man therefore examine himself.

WHEN personal interests or passions are involved in the oath, there is special cause for self-examination. A man not wholly unprincipled may be led, through avarice, anger at being prosecuted, and a pride in adhering to what he has often said, to swear falsely ; and yet when the heat of contest is over, when the dishonourable victory is gained, and the mean prize contemplated, when the whole is reviewed in sober sadness ; the voice of conscience is heard again,
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its violated rights again are vindicated. He finds no rest till he gives back what he has got by perjury.

IF this be an account of what really happens, it is a warning to judges, to delay administering an oath till other means of decision be tried, and till the man who is to swear has time to think : It is a warning to those who litigate, to commune with their own hearts before it be too late.

WHERE there is a strong temptation to swear falsely, be in proportion watchful and jealous over yourselves.

THEY who manufacture Exciseable Goods or deal in Foreign Articles, are particularly exposed to temptation. If any reconcile their minds to habitual perjury, because the profits of trade and provision for their families are interwoven with guilt, necessity is laid upon us to undeceive them : We dare not heal so dangerous a wound slightly, nor say peace peace, where there is no peace. God must be loved more than the world,

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temporal

temporal must yield to everlasting interests. The practice of false swearing must be renounced, the accursed fruits of it restored, and a contrite heart offered to the God of mercy.

OATHS are sometimes administered, both by civil and church courts, in cases of Fornication and Adultery. A guilty man is tempted from shame and avarice to swear falsely. While depressed by the recollection of guilt, he is called to sacrifice his reputation and worldly interest, by assuming a disgrace and burden from which a false oath might redeem him; and, though temptation prevailed in an unguarded hour, he is now called upon to shew himself incapable of deliberate and deep iniquity. The situation is very hazardous; it is that of a man who has wandered from the right road, and is come to a pass from whence he must return or lose himself. Some have sworn to their innocence, before justices of the peace, to avoid the maintenance of a child, who are nevertheless shrewdly suspected of guilt; and who endeavour to soothe their consciences

consciences with nice distinctions about the time and manner of their guilt. Some have demanded the oath of purgation from a church court, who afterwards confessed. Others have confessed after they had sworn. And others, it is to be feared, have gone to God with a lie in their right hand. We exhort those who have been overtaken in such faults, as they tender the divine mercy, not to aggravate their guilt. The door of mercy is yet open, but perjury fears the conscience and quenches the spirit of holiness. Observe by the way, how one sin leads to another. Unlawful pleasure may lead to perjury and poison. "Her house is the way to hell, leading down to the chambers of death."

THERE are laws about Killing Game. Persons accused of breaking these laws are sometimes examined upon oath. They may be tempted through ignorance, or poverty, or perhaps an opinion that these laws are oppressive and the penalties severe, to swear falsely. Obedience to the laws of the land is a duty, when they require nothing which

God forbids, and forbid nothing which he requires. If in any instance they bear hard on the lower ranks; the poor to whom the gospel is preached, must consider it as one of the trials annexed to a low estate, in which they are called to suffer rather than sin. It were indeed to be wished, that the Legislature would repeal laws which are confessedly severe; and, in the mean time, that they who execute them would do it with mildness and moderation: They would thereby consult the interests of liberty and humanity, and prevent some poor unhappy men from endangering their eternal salvation.

OATHS are, from time to time, administered about the Tax on Candles. There is reason to apprehend, that the hurry and want of solemnity on the one hand, and on the other your forgetfulness and inaccuracy, and perhaps self-deceit in paying the duty by a heavier weight than you can purchase them by, may prove a snare. It were pity that the consciences of Christians should be defiled, or even run a risk of defilement for
such

such a trifle. It is submitted to the consideration of tender Christians, whether it were not better to purchase candles, and endeavour to make up the profit in manufacturing by thrift in using them.

A PRISONER who professes upon oath to surrender his effects to his creditors, and yet secretes or reserves a part, “lies not only unto men but unto God.” Poverty may be sustained when it is not brought on nor accompanied by guilt. The love of many to whom much is given is not yet waxed cold, nor is the hand of the Almighty shortened. But if you retain what is not your’s, in defiance of divine and human laws, a curse overshadows you.

IN the late act relating to Bankrupts many oaths are required, and we must thence warn you against fresh temptations to swear falsely.

IT IS MATTER OF LAMENTATION that oaths abound so exceedingly. It may be said
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of Britain as it was of Judah, “ because of
 “ swearing the land mourns.” False swear-
 ing is a national evil. All ranks should
 conspire to avert it. In framing and a-
 mending laws, every strong temptation
 to it should be withdrawn. Oaths should
 never be imposed nor taken when they can
 be avoided. They should be accompanied
 with a clear explanation and with due so-
 lemnity. All tendency to prevaricate should
 be checked, and prevarication punished.
 The partiality of Counsellors for their cli-
 ents should be bounded by a superior re-
 gard to truth. Among those who litigate,
 let no matter be pushed unnecessarily the
 length of swearing. It is against charity
 to provoke a man of feeble virtue to for-
 swear; his perjury defiles the land and
 hardens himself.

WERE Lawgivers to listen, it might be
 suggested, that reverence for oaths is lessen-
 ed by their frequency; that perplexing
 oaths, annexed to offices of trust, exclude
 the conscientious; that revenue oaths give
 premiums to the impious; that there is
 danger

danger in obliging men either to perjure or betray themselves ; that political passions and commercial interests, when bounded by oaths on every side, and obstructed at every step, will at last break through them ; that one who has made light of excise and custom-house and election oaths, is prepared to make light of oaths which affect private property and life ; that a perjurer is fit for treason. The strongest pillar may be overloaded, and when an oath breaks down, the fabric of civil government will shake.

OUR influence is chiefly with the lower ranks, and our object is, to make them understand and fear an oath.

LET the words of an oath be pondered.

“ God is my witness.” It awakens the remembrance of God, of his all-seeing eye, of the pleasant countenance with which he beholds the upright. You blush to tell a lie in the presence of one who can detect you, much more to swear that you have received no bribe nor promise of good deed,
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in the presence of one from whom you received them. Why do you thus stand in awe of a fellow-creature? Why are you ashamed and afraid of guilt in the presence of a man like yourself? It is because the image of God is stamped upon him, and because that image reflects an approbation of truth and an abhorrence of falsehood. If a human presence operates thus powerfully, shall not the presence of God operate with all-powerful influence? Only admit this truth into your heart, while upon oath, that God is present with you, and its influence will be all-powerful. A sense of God's presence corrects the errors of the understanding and of the heart. The difference betwixt right and wrong appears. The obligation to do right is felt. There is a conscious dignity and pleasure in the divine approbation and complacence.

“ So help me God.” Help me to fulfil the sacred obligation I now come under. So help me in the hour of solemn devotion, when thou bestowest the blessing from on high on the man who has not sworn deceitfully.

fully. So help me at my utmost need. There are scenes of danger and of sorrow through which we have all to pass, when the help of man is vain, when our hope is in God: To swear falsely is to renounce that hope.

“As I shall answer.” Significant and awful words! The tribunal of God rises to my view, at which I shall answer. Books are opened, which contain the actions and the thoughts of men, where the appeal I now make is recorded. The world and its transitory interests disappear. My soul wait thou only upon God. Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity.

FEAR AN OATH. God’s presence is awful. His judgment makes us afraid. This fear, which so well becomes us, and which all may cherish, is a better preservative from falsehood than profound reasoning. “The disputers of this world darken counsel. Wise men after the flesh seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and to make his law of none effect.” The

Greeks were at the same time a learned and a perfidious people. The most learned order of the Roman church were the most presumptuous teachers of perfidy. Ingenuity is not needed for the observance, but for the breach of an oath. "My son, cease from the instruction that causeth to err. Behold, to fear the Lord that is wisdom."

AVOID swearing whenever it can be lawfully avoided. As much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men. Stir not up the angry spirit of litigation for a small matter. If you be humble, preferring peace to money and victory, you may escape much litigation, and the habitual swearing of the litigious. Avoid as much as possible those branches of trade and manufacture which are compassed about with ensnaring oaths. Smuggling is a trade directly sinful. "A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked."

THE fear of an oath overcomes other fears. You are called perhaps to give a report upon oath, founded on skill in your profession.

profession. The fear of reflections from your brethren of the same profession, of offending a great man whose interest is at stake, and of suffering in your future employment subside; for the fear of God is before your eyes. You exercise your professional skill with calm serious attention, and give a report according to truth.

THERE are forms of oaths appointed by the Legislature in particular cases, and he that fears an oath will consider before taking them. He will not rest indolently in the opinion and practice of another when he himself must swear. In a matter of such consequence he finds it prudent to see with his own eyes, to use his own reason, to listen to his own conscience, to think and judge and act for himself. He will avoid swearing while a doubt remains in his own mind. Here, if any where, the safe side should be chosen. It is doubtless the safe side to avoid even a risk of swearing falsely. If temporal interest must be resigned, if the favour of the great must be forfeited, if ambition must be checked; they are sacrifices

with which God is well pleased. An approving conscience is an ample recompence.

COMPARE calmly the two states: Of one in place and favour and opulent circumstances, but who has made his way through false oaths; and of one in humble circumstances who retains his integrity.

WHEN a promissory oath is to be taken, it is meet to consider before hand the nature and extent of the obligation we are to come under. After vows it is too late to make enquiry.

IN swearing allegiance to the King, we should attend to the duties of a subject, and resolve to fulfil them. Let the remembrance of that oath check all tendency to faction and disloyalty; and excite every one in his sphere to support a constitution, which it is our happiness to enjoy, as well as our duty to maintain.

WHEN an oath of fidelity in an office of trust must be taken, let us enquire if we
have

have ability and time and a firm purpose to fulfil the duties of it. Let those who have taken such an oath remember, that it implies not only a resolution at the time, but endeavours afterward to fulfil their duty. It is intended as a security to others with whom we are connected by our office for the faithful discharge of it ; and to ourselves it ought to be a constant remembrancer to avoid carelessness and sloth, as well as direct unfaithfulness.

AVOID THE SINS WHICH LEAD TO PERJURY.

THE practice of swearing in common conversation, so absurd in itself, and so expressive of emptiness, ill-manners, and an undisciplined mind, is further aggravated as it leads to perjury. One who has broke through the restraints of decency, is prepared to break through other restraints. He can hardly retain reverence for a name which he daily profanes, and a tribunal to which he appeals about every trifle ; nor stand in awe of damnation, which he lightly im-

imprecates on the souls of others and on his own soul.

SOME have a practice, in their private transactions, of using the form and words of an oath. In making bargains, for example, they use the sacred name, and aver such and such particulars concerning their goods to be true, as they shall answer. In justifying themselves they call God to witness. In borrowing money, they wish, if they do not pay at the appointed time, that they may never see his face in mercy. The communication of Christians upon such occasions should be “yea yea, nay nay; for “whatsoever is more than these cometh of “evil.” If solemn asseverations be used to cloak falsehood, it is guilt highly aggravated.

AN habitual regard for truth is a mean of avoiding perjury. Religious and moral obligations corroborate each other. One who is afraid to tell a lie, thinks of swearing to it with horror: But the band of religion is feeble when the band of truth is loosed.

loosed. One who is accustomed to disguise or conceal truth, and to shape his evasive answers according to humour or fear or malice, is apt to do the same things when examined upon oath. A deliberate lie is the step next to perjury. One who is cautious in making promises, and scrupulous to fulfil them, will be more so when bound by an oath. "He changeth not, though he swear" to his hurt."

SOBER industry is a mean of avoiding temptation. Want, when it is the effect of idleness mismanagement or dissipation, may tempt men to swear falsely. A controversy about debt may be referred to your oath, there is often no other method of deciding it: Then the profane prodigal is prompted by his wants to perjure himself. If there be wretches who sell themselves to commit this great transgression, they are probably such as have contracted habits of sloth and luxury without means of gratifying them.

LET witnesses beware of those who would tamper with them. They court and flatter; they

they intimate advantages if you can truly swear so and so; they hint whom it will oblige, and what power he has to do you good or ill; they endeavour to talk you into a persuasion that you know or remember as they would have you.---These are the children of the wicked one, they are doing his work, plotting your eternal ruin. Stop your ear against their insinuations, partake not of their drink or their dainties, have no communication with them.

WE know well that they who tempt others to swear falsely are beyond the reach of any of the means of grace committed unto us. It is our duty however to testify, that those who employ their wealth to corrupt, or their power to intimidate, or their talents to explain away the obvious meaning of an oath; who persuade the poor, the fearful, or the ignorant to take God's name in vain; that they are partakers of the guilt in which they involve the perjurer.

PERJURY is forbidden in the first table of the law. It is taking God's name in
vain,

vain, which he will not hold guiltless. “ As
 “ I live, saith the Lord, surely mine oath,
 “ which he hath despised, even it will I re-
 “ compence on his own head. The curse
 “ of God shall enter into the house of him
 “ that sweareth falsely, it shall remain in
 “ his house, and shall consume it, the tim-
 “ ber thereof and the stones thereof.” It is
 an observation of your own, and become
 proverbial among you, that one who swears
 falsely has never afterwards a day to do
 well. He has hardened himself against God
 and he cannot prosper. His mind is like the
 troubled sea. In the hour of silence, and in
 the hour of danger, he is haunted with this
 joyless and dismaying thought, that God is
 his enemy.

FALSE WITNESS is likewise forbidden in
 the second table of the law. It violates the
 most important human rights—property,
 reputation, life. Ask the man who has suf-
 fered by perjury, and he will tell you what a
 heinous crime it is, and what deep resent-
 ment it awakens. Put yourself in the situa-
 tion of such a man, and listen to the lan-
 guage of your own heart.

“ IF a false witness rise up against any
 “ man,” says the law of Moses, “ and testi-
 “ fy against him that which is wrong, then
 “ shall ye do unto him as he thought to have
 “ done to his brother.” If an innocent man
 has suffered death through perjury, it is just
 that the false witness die. “ He has assassi-
 “ nated his brother, and contaminated with
 “ blood the sacred stream of justice.”

By our own law, imprisonment, confisca-
 tion, and infamy are denounced. One who
 breaks down the fence by which liberty and
 property are secured, forfeits his own: The
 violator of truth is consigned to infamy.
 Let not the glare of wealth, nor the glosses
 of casuistry, nor fashionable maxims of po-
 liteness efface the brand of infamy from the
 perjurer.

AMONG all nations an oath is respected.
 Even the worshippers of false gods are afraid
 to swear falsely. It seems one of the origi-
 nal notices given to men, that there is an in-
 visible witness of human actions, and a day
 of just retribution. It is given to supply the
 imperfection of human laws, and to strength-
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en, with the band of religion, every moral tie. Were it not for the sacredness of an oath, innocence would cease to be a protection, industry would be vain, a good name would be a precarious treasure, mutual confidence would cease, the bands of society would be broken.

WHETHER we view the laws of God or of men against swearing falsely, its effects on society, or on the man who commits it, it appears surrounded with guilt and danger. "It is a word compassed about with death. "God grant it be not found in the dwellings of Jacob."

THIS WARNING the Presbytery give you from a sense of duty, and a concern for your best interests, whether you will hear or whether you will forbear. If you lend a deaf ear, and harden yourselves in sin, it shall yet be known that the servants of the Lord have been among you, that the trumpet has not given an uncertain sound, that ye have not perished for lack of knowledge. Your blood shall not be required at their hands.

WE

WE hope better things of you. It is our joint and fervent prayer, that the mean now used may prove effectual. We are ready to give you further instruction, both in public and private, on this and every other branch of religious and moral conduct. If ever you be at a loss to discern sin and duty, and to apply the law of God to your own case, we are ready to give our advice, when you are pleased to ask it, with the affection of a father and the faithfulness of a friend.

IF you take this admonition in good part, and if the fruits of it shall appear; if you discover a tenderness of conscience, and an habitual regard to the divine law; and if, in difficult and trying steps, you be chiefly solicitous to approve yourselves unto God; it will be a ground of hope, that those days of fasting and humiliation, which have so often returned, will at last be changed into a day of thanksgiving; that righteousness and peace will meet together in our land, filling our hearts with gladness and our mouths with praise.

THE END.



Verona
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